



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

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The following statement by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes was made public today in connection with the relocation of Japanese American citizens and friendly law-abiding aliens of Japanese descent from WRA centers in the west to locations in the middle west and east:

Within the past two weeks the American people have heard three high public officials giving voice to opinions that seem ominously out of tune in a nation that is fighting for the principles of democracy and freedom.

First the Governor of New Jersey, then the Governor of Ohio, and now, of all people, the Mayor of New York City, have expressed a belief that American citizens of Japanese ancestry and law-abiding Japanese aliens are not entitled to the same privileges as non-Japanese and should be accorded special treatment.

This is a strange fife and drum corps to be playing the discordant anthem of racial discrimination. Stranger by far than fiction. The Mayor of New York City, who has fought long and vigorously for racial equality and justice, carrying the flag, must be shocked and disturbed to find the drummer boy from New Jersey on his left and the fifer from Ohio flanking him on the right. I cannot but believe that he has joined this company through accident and misunderstanding rather than by deliberate choice.

Mayor LaGuardia has protested against the relocation of persons of Japanese ancestry in New York City, apparently on the theory that these people are dangerous and subversive. Actually there has not been one proven case of sabotage on the part of a Japanese American since the war began -- not even in Hawaii. The people who are being relocated from War Relocation Authority centers have been painstakingly checked and found, on the basis of their records, to be loyal American citizens or law-abiding aliens. Approximately 800 of these people are now living in New York City. To the best of my knowledge, they have not caused the slightest trouble and I am sure they have no intention of doing so. Thus I can see no basis for the Mayor's fears or for his protests. I can only say that neither Governor Bricker nor Governor Edge is the type of bedfellow that he ordinarily chooses, nor the type of thinking that most of us expect from Mayor LaGuardia.

The Governor of Ohio, the Honorable John W. Bricker, is guilty not only of prejudice but of disregard of the facts. In trying to further his Presidential aspirations before a Los Angeles audience last week, Governor Bricker expressed the opinion that after the war each West Coast community should determine for itself whether the people of Japanese ancestry should be permitted to return to their former homes. He also charged the War Relocation Authority of the Department of the Interior with releasing disloyal persons and cited as evidence the cases of 28 Japanese American soldiers who recently refused to take combat training.

In accusing WRA of releasing men who later manifested disloyalty in uniform, the Governor didn't know what he was talking about. As it happens, all 28 of the men involved in this incident were inducted into the Army before the West Coast evacuation and have thus never been under jurisdiction of the War Relocation Authority. But when the Governor told a group of Californians that they were wholly justified in preventing an American citizen from returning to his home, his farm, or his business because they don't like his complexion or his grandfather, the Governor deliberately kicked the Constitution in the teeth.

I hold no brief for the Governor of New Jersey, the Honorable Walter E. Edge, who was the first of this triumvirate to express his racial-tinged opinions. In talking to a group of farmers who had succeeded in driving five thoroughly investigated and law-abiding Japanese workers from a neighbor's farm, Governor Edge told the protesting group, "I guess I don't blame you." Prior to the Governor's statement, the farmer who had contemplated hiring the Japanese workers had received anonymous telephone calls, had been threatened with violence, and finally had had one of the buildings on his property destroyed by fire. If Governor Edge can condone this sort of lawlessness and violence in his State and still hold his head up in the company of democratic men, then to him the Constitution is nothing but a dust rag.

As I pointed out in a recent statement in San Francisco, the relocation of Japanese Americans to a large extent is a local problem. It is a problem of the people of California, Oregon, and Washington, where, unfortunately, a few prejudiced and vocal men have created a public clamor that has stirred unnecessary apprehension and bitterness in other parts of the Nation.

I have no hesitancy in saying that an overwhelming majority of the American public -- firm believers in fair play and the Constitution -- hold no animosity against these homeless and blameless victims of a wartime military decision. As an indication of this, even in the far West, I should like to call attention to an assembly of more than 500 girls from ten Arizona high schools who met at Rivera, Ariz., on April 15, with Japanese American school girls from the WRA Gila River, Ariz., project to discuss in a spirit of tolerance and good will their mutual problems. To me such a meeting spells anything but racial intolerance. To me it is indicative of the way the vast majority of our citizens feel, once they have the facts, toward those of Japanese descent, Governors Bricker and Edge and Mayor LaGuardia notwithstanding. Little children shall lead them.

